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ABSTRACT

A project was undertaken at a suburban community college to develop a Classroom Assessment Technique (CAT) that would enable parent education teachers to determine what parents learned from the lecture/discussion component of the program and whether or not the parents implemented the lessons learned. The CAT was used over a period of 6 weeks by full- and part-time instructors who taught in the parent education program. The CAT requires teachers to: (1) choose the parent education class in which to carry out the CAT; (2) choose the parent education topic to be taught; (3) write down two learning goals for that topic; (4) write down two objectives for each goal; (5) formulate the objectives into questions to be answered by the questions in the class; (6) before teaching the topic, ask parents to anonymously answer one set of questions about the topic; (7) after teaching the topic, ask parents to answer a second set of questions; and (8) one month later, give parents a third set of questions on the same topic. A total of 2,460 questions were answered by parents during the outcome assessment survey. Out of 185 parents who completed the follow-up questionnaire, 90% stated they used class information to enhance their parenting. Parents improved and retained their knowledge 4 to 6 weeks after the class was taken. However, less than 75% of the instructors rated the CAT useful or better, many criticizing the time it took away from teaching. Future recommendations include giving instructors more time to formulate goals, objectives, and assessment questions; and planning how to provide parents with information about the assessment program without jeopardizing the outcome. Appendixes include the CAT project description, instructor survey, parent questionnaire, and program implementation guide. (KP)

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Development and Implementation of a Parent Education Outcome Assessment Technique

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A Practicum Report Presented to the

Master's Program in Child Care, Youth Care, and Family Support

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Science

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Abstract

Development and Implementation of a Parent Education Outcome Assessment Technique. Hobbs, Sylvia H., 1994: Practicum Report, Nova University, Master's Program for Child Care, Youth Care and Family Support. Descriptors: Parent Education/Early Childhood Education/Outcome Assessment/Evaluation/Goals and Objectives.

Current methods used to evaluate the effectiveness of a parent education program at a community college did not provide specific information on how effectively parents learned from the lecture/discussion component of the program or whether or not parents implemented the lessons learned.

A new Classroom Assessment Technique has been designed and implemented. This technique provides a measure of what the parents have learned, retained and implemented from the lecture/discussion component of the parent education program.

The new Classroom Assessment Technique was used over a period of six weeks in the classroom by instructors who teach in the parent education program. These instructors evaluated the usefulness of this technique in providing prompt feedback to them on what the parents learned and implemented from the parent education lecture/discussion. The parent education instructors found the Classroom Assessment Technique easy to use and useful in providing them with feedback on their teaching.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The setting in which the problem occurs

I work at a community college in a suburb that has a population of 200,000. This suburb is in close proximity to a large city which has over half a million inhabitants. I am an instructor in the Parent Education Program and the Early Childhood Education Department. My practicum will be carried out in the parent education program of the community college.

Currently there are 32 community and technical colleges in the state with parent education programs serving a total of 20,000 families. Parent education programs in the state are state supported vocational classes. Parent education is taught in cooperative preschools organized through the community colleges and vocational technical colleges. The community colleges are reimbursed financially a percentage amount by the state for every parent enrolled in the parent education/preschool programs. The community colleges provide a parent education instructor for every preschool enrolled in their parent education program.

The parent education program at the community college where I work serves a wide geographical area covering six school districts. The catchment area ranges from suburban to rural, and the families served range from upper middle class to those living at, or below, poverty level. No family is turned away from one of the parent education/preschools due to inability to pay: there is a scholarship

fund available for such situations. The community college serves approximately 1,300 families each academic year.

There are 28 part-time parent education instructors working in the parent education program at the community college. These parent education instructors serve 61 preschool programs (each serving 18 to 25 families) for families with children ranging from birth to six years of age. All of the parent education instructors are required to have a college degree and some background experience in working with families. The parent education instructors at the community college have a variety of undergraduate degrees: social work, education, nursing, early childhood education, psychology, special education or home economics. All parent education instructors have to be vocationally certified by the state every five years. To be certified requires many hours of inservice training, plus classes on first aid and teaching techniques.

Parent education instructors at the community college are allowed a maximum of three classes in which to teach parent education, and are paid for 182 hours per year, 60.5 hours per quarter for each class, and work with each preschool for three academic quarters (one academic year). There is a full-time director of the parent education program, and the program comes under the Division of Educational Development of the community college, headed by the division chair (who will be my practicum verifier).

The parent education classes offered to parents consist of three components: lecture, laboratory and leadership. The parent education instructor is required to offer regularly scheduled, formal parent education classes and discussion groups for the

parents. In addition,the parent spends time in the preschool classroom interacting with the parent education instructor, the teacher, the other participating parents, and the children. The parent also spends part of the time observing the children in the preschool setting. This is the laboratory component of the parent education class.

The leadership component of the parent education class is fulfilled when the parent education instructor trains and assists the parents to take on a variety of responsible jobs in connection with the parent education class. Examples of the jobs that parents might do are as follows: act as treasurer for the class, represent the class on the parent advisory committee of the community college, or be a fundraiser organizer for the preschool.

Each parent education instructor functions as resource person, advisor and educator to the parents enrolled in the parent education class. The instructor presents information to the parents in the form of lectures and materials, facilitates discussion, and acts as a resource for the the group and for individuals. The goal of the parent education instructor is to give parents the necessary information and skills to empower them to act more confidently and competently with their families and make informed family decisions by building on their own family strengths.

In the parent education program parents assume a role of active leadership in the management of their own education as parents and in the educational growth and development of their children. The parents rely on guidance, advice, suggestions and recommendations from the parent education instructor, rather than a

preconceived established curriculum of what parents "should know". This affords parents the opportunity to determine for themselves what they need and want to learn and how they feel they should proceed. This model promotes parent participation and involvement in their own education as parents.

Each parent education class is equivalent to three vocational credits per quarter at the community college. The community college requires that parents enrolled in the parent education classes spend approximately two to three hours a month in direct contact with the parent education instructor in a formal, planned parent education class and discussion time. In addition, the parent spends eight to ten hours a month in the preschool classroom in direct contact with the teacher, children and preschool activities.

The parent education program of the community college provides two different types of classes and methods of teaching parent education to families enrolled in its parent education programs. The first type follows the traditional framework of cooperative preschool programs. These preschool programs are for children, three, four and five (and occasionally up to six) years of age, which meet for two and a half hours, two, three or four times a week, depending on the age of the child.

The parents of these children in the cooperative preschool are totally in charge of their preschool program. They contract for the facility, hire the teacher, collect the fees and decide how the money will be spent (this is the leadership component of the parent education class). They also work several days a month in the preschool as assistant teachers (this is considered by the community

college as the laboratory part of their parent education class). The parent education instructor works with the parents to assist in the running of the preschool program in accordance with state standards, and with the teacher on providing an appropriate curriculum for the children. The parent education instructor teaches a parent education class one evening a month to the parents and attends the preschool one day every week. The instructor is also responsible for testing the four year children as to their readiness for kindergarten, conferencing with parents at least once a year and being available for informal conferencing and communication at all times. The instructor brings resources and referral information from the community to the parents enrolled in the class, as well as providing books, literature, handouts, films, videos and other pertinent information on parent education and family support.

The second type of parent education class is called a child study laboratory class. This includes all the parent education programs for children under three years of age: infants (birth to twelve months of age), pretoddlers (thirteen to twenty four months of age), and toddlers (two to three years of age), plus a few classes for three, four and five year olds. The main difference between this laboratory class and a cooperative preschool is that these classes meet only one day a week for two hours and the parent attends every session with their child. The parent education instructor also attends every class session. These child study laboratory classes are organized and run by the parent education instructor, who contracts for the facility, hires the teacher, oversees the curriculum collects and disseminates the finances for

the group, and is responsible for the parent education component. The remainder of the parent education instructor's role in the child study laboratory is the same as in the cooperative preschools. Parent education lectures and formal discussions in the child study laboratories are offered at every weekly class to half the parents in the class for fifty minutes to an hour. Each parent attends a parent education class every other week. The remaining time that the parent spends and works in the classroom is considered by the community college to be the laboratory part of the parent education class.

The student's role in the setting

I have been a parent education instructor at this community college for 25 years. I have worked with every age group of children under six years of age and both types of classes: cooperative preschool programs and child study laboratories. I have also taught many evening classes in parent education on a variety of topics such as discipline, parenting infants, parenting toddlers, single parent families, and families with preadolescents. I also teach the parent education component and the infant curriculum component of the Early Childhood Education Associate Degree Program at the community college.

Currently I am a parent education instructor in a four year old cooperative preschool/parent education class, in a three year old cooperative preschool/parent education class, and in a one to two year old child study laboratory class.

About seven years ago I was on the committee that put together the evaluation that, in a slightly modified form, is currently used by the parent education program. At that time, to learn more about evaluation techniques, I attended an all-day workshop on evaluation given by Heather Weiss. In addition to using the current evaluation method for the parent education program, the parent education program director plans to move into using outcome assessment as an additional informative, useful method of evaluation for parent education instructors. The parent education program director and I will work together to plan and develop the change to using an outcome assessment instrument for the lecture component of the parent education program to be used in conjunction with the current evaluation tool.

In the many years that I have worked as a parent education instructor at the community college, I have sat on several problem solving committees at the community college. One of the most recent of these committee was the committee for integrating the community college's new general education requirements into the early childhood degree curriculum. Another committee I participated in was one on setting a salary scale for preschool teachers in the parent education preschool classes offered by the community college. These committee responsibilities have given me some valuable experience in problem solving which will be of assistance to me in working on this practicum project.

CHAPTER II

THE PROBLEM

Problem statement

Parent education instructors at the community college need prompt feedback on the effects and effectiveness of the teaching component of their job to help them develop their skills in teaching and to modify and adjust their teaching curriculum as required. There is no outcome assessment technique available in the parent education program at the community college, which would provide immediate feedback to the parent education instructor on how much parenting knowledge parents already have on a specific topic that is to be taught; how much information the parents retain from the parent education lecture component, and whether the parents use this information with their families. The current evaluation tool used in the parent education program does not provide this information.

The parent education program at the community college needs an outcome assessment tool that is user friendly for both instructors and parents in the parent education program at the community college. This assessment tool should provide quick feedback to instructors on how well parents are learning, retaining and implementing parenting information taught by the instructors using the lecture/discussion format.

Documentation of the Problem

Currently, there is a general feeling in America that families are in trouble. It is a consensus that there is a breakdown in parenting and family function. Family life has been affected by the

change in the traditional roles for women and men, the large diversity between American families, and the changing ways of rearing children. Because of all these factors there are many different ways to provide effective programs for families. Therefore, legislators, funders, social workers, and policy makers are looking very carefully at family programs that work. It is important for family programs to have good documentation about their program's effectiveness in order to find support and to continue their work with families. As Zigler and Friedman (1987) commented, "survival of family resource programs.....is dependent in part on having information about their efficacy" (p. 15).

Many thousands of programs across the country provide services to children and parents. Many of these can be described as family support programs. That is, they have an ecological approach (with undefined theoretical frameworks), they are community-based, they provide social support, with primary and secondary prevention of family dysfunction, they have a multilateral approach to service delivery, and they stress an interdependent relationship between the family and the community. However, for the most part, family support programs use rather loose theoretical frameworks that make it very difficult to know definitely which factors in the program provide the positive influences that may help program participants.

It is not easy to evaluate the effectiveness of programs for families. A large number of family support programs are family-oriented, not family-focused. This difference between programs, plus the incredible variety of populations served, each with a wide diversity of needs, and with services provided by many different

agencies, means that evaluation of effectiveness of each program to be used as a comparison of what works best for families, is extremely difficult. There is no one evaluation assessment method that will work for all programs serving families. Powell (1987) states this strongly:

> Family support programs provide an important research opportunity. The methodological and conceptual problems that their evaluation presents are many, and no one study can find solutions or generate answers to critical questions about program processes and effects. (p. 325)

There are no simple answers as to how family support and parent education programs can measure their impact on parents. This is because few in-depth evaluations on this topic have been conducted.

In the past, most evaluation methods used in programs for parents and children focused on the child, Weiss (1983). The evaluators looked at how the child's developmental performance was being improved. Often it was the child's cognitive development that was particularly focused upon. Relatively few programs evaluated parent related outcome.

Another problem that affects evaluations of parent outcome assessment is that often there is little change detected or documented through use of these evaluation measures. This does not mean that there is anything wrong with the program. A program may be only a small part of a parent's of family's weekly or monthly activities. Long-term family patterns, cultural preferences, and

attitudes and individual personalities do not change quickly or easily. Increased duration and intensity of participation in a program may be what is required to see more changes. Harmon and Brim (1980) noted that changes in parents take 1 - 2 years. Therefore dramatic changes may not occur in less intensive and short term programs and assessment methods must take this into account.

Evaluation can be broken down in various ways, one of these is outcome assessment. Zigler and Black (1989) state that more outcome studies of family resource programs are needed that longitudinally establish patterns and changes in different aspects of child, parent and family functioning. Kagan (1991) states that, "Program outcome evaluations, whether conducted by program staff or researchers, need to flourish" (p.17), in order to learn more about the conditions under which, and the populations for which, family support works best.

The evaluation problem at the community college parent education program can be divided into two parts. Firstly, the problem of the evaluation process has to be dealt with. As there is a lack of research information on outcome assessment in parent education, at the present time the program at the community college cannot rely on another agency to come up with the definitive outcome assessment tool. The program will have to look at its own goals for outcome assessment in its own setting and develop and implement a specific tool for its own use.

The community college has no money in its budget for working on outcome evaluation in parent education. Therefore the outcome assessment process will have to cost virtually nothing.

Parent education classes at the community college meet from one to two hours every other week, or once a month for two hours, for eight months of the year, a relatively short amount of time. The changes that occur in the parenting skills of the parents in these programs would be expected to be relatively small, and therefore difficult to measure, due to the small amount of time the parents are actually in a class. Therefore the evaluation process used to assess parent outcome must take into account this time factor and develop an assessment tool that will give meaningful results over a short period of time.

The second part of the problem for the parent education program at the community college is dealing with parent outcome. Currently, the evaluation tool used by the parent education program at the community college has been looking at the parent's assessment of the physical plant (that is, the preschool) and how much their child has learnt from the preschool program. An evaluation method is needed that is broader and looks at parent outcome as one of its measures.

The community college is looking at how effectively instructors are teaching and students are learning. Funding for community colleges across the state is tight. Programs have to prove their efficacy to survive. The parent education program at the community college is no exception: to survive the program has to develop a parent outcome assessment tool.

Analysis of the Problem

Weiss and Hite (1986), in a report from a national program survey conducted by The Harvard Family Research Project, asked what systematic evidence was available to make the case that family support programs bring about positive changes for families. Their Research Project showed that family support program development was far ahead of program evaluation.

Weiss and Hite collected, critiqued and synthesized information about program effectiveness and evaluation. This led them to an evaluation model - the Five-Tiered Approach to Program Evaluation - which was used to collect information about what family support programs were doing with evaluation. They looked not only at the large "flagship" evaluations of programs with large budgets but at smaller family support programs, some of which had no money for evaluations at all.

For the purpose of the study of evaluations the Weiss and Hite Five-Tiered Approach was collapsed into three tiers. The first tier was a simple one, where the program collected some background data on the families. The second tier was a mid-level evaluation, where family satisfaction assessments were done. The third tier was a more complex evaluation level where the evaluation assesses program impact on families.

The parent education program at the community college has been using a level two evaluation method, but would like to move to the more complex level, tier three, and use an evaluation method that assesses parent outcome.

Family support programs that used simple evaluation methods were usually low budget programs according to Weiss and Hite (1986). They found that if these programs wanted to move to a more complex level of evaluation then several changes had to take place if the evaluation was to be a success. Low cost technical assistance was great help, as was having an outside evaluator or consultant. Appropriate assessment instruments that were easy to use was a high priority. Good interpretable results that provide feedback and strengthen the program were also highly rated. Finally, adequate resources: time, money, a computer, and someone who can handle it, ensured that the evaluation does not become burdensome.

In reviewing these requirements for successful, more complex evaluation methods, the parent education program at the community college faces many challenges.

There are many reasons why the parent education program at the community college would like to change its evaluation tool to a more outcome based instrument. The parent education program director wants the program to start the process of looking at the parent education program curriculum in terms of outcome assessment, using family support terminology for its goals and objectives (which have not been used in the past). Using outcome assessment would make replicating successful parent education curriculum more possible.

In these tough times financially, community colleges in the state are being hard hit by budget cutbacks. Programs such as parent education, are often the hardest hit when money is short. The parent education director would like to have more concrete evidence that parent education is successfully reaching its stated goals when she

attends budget meetings and has to compete for money for the parent education program. A list of the prime requisites for funding of the community college programs in the 1995 - 1996 academic year was recently sent to all program chairs. One of these requirements was that the program should have measurable successful outcomes for its students. To survive as a program at the community college in the near future the parent education program needs to begin working on outcome assessment now.

The community college is monitored by the state and is required by the state to do evaluations of all its classes and keep the evaluations on file and open for inspection. A year or so ago the community college started to use outcome assessment as a method of evaluating its classes, and a full-time director of outcome assessment was hired. The outcome assessment director is involved with looking at global subjects as regards outcome within the college, for example, creative writing, and quantitative thinking, most of which are not applicable to parent education goals. Therefore, the parent education program decided to work on developing its own outcome assessment plan.

Every ten years, each division within the community college is assessed for accreditation by the state by an independent team of assessors. The community college is currently preparing for this process. In the spring of 1994, the Educational Development Division of the community college, under which the parent education program falls, was due to begin the accreditation assessment. One of the items that the state accreditation team is looking for is outcome assessment in all the programs at the community college.

The current evaluation method used in the parent education program at the community college is not assessing the program's impact on parents, therefore the process needs to be changed. The current method of evaluation in the parent education program at the community college is a one-page questionnaire (Appendix A) which is given to every parent enrolled in the program in March of the academic year. The evaluations are handed out and monitored by another parent in the program, not by the instructor or teacher. The evaluation consists of a one page questionnaire of twenty questions. Each question is rated on five point scale: definite strength, satisfactory, needs to improve, unsatisfactory, and not observed. Once the questionnaires are filled out by the parents, they are collected by the supervising parent in the classroom, who seals them in an envelope and then sends them to the parent education program director.

The evaluations are then sent through the college's computer system. The paper the questionnaire is printed on is specially treated so that the pencil marks can be scanned by a computer. At the end of the questionnaire there is space for individual written comments from the parents. These comments are collated by hand and sent back to the parent education program director along with the computerized printout of the evaluation results. The parent education program director gives the results back to the parent education instructors (with her comments if necessary) along with any written comments. The parent education instructor receives her evaluations in late April or early May, a few weeks before the end of the current academic year.

The evaluation tool (Appendix A) currently in use at the community college parent education program does focus in a very general way on the lecture/discussion part of the parent educator's job. Question 1 asks if the parent education instructor "Provides information about normal childhood growth and behavior" and question 12 states "Teaches guidance and discipline techniques for handling typical behavior of young children". Questions 5 and 6 ask if the parent education instructor "Facilitates an effective group discussion" and "Adapts discussion topics and methods to the needs of the group".

The current evaluation tool that is used by the parent education department at the community college is a very generalized one. Once a year all aspects of the parent educator's job is evaluated. The evaluation gives an overview as to whether the parent education instructor has performed her job satisfactorily. However, the evaluation does not give any information on parent outcome. It does not give any feedback on what or how much information the parents have learned and retained from each parent education topic that is taught. The evaluation tool does not give any information about whether parents change their parenting behavior after receiving the information and materials from the parent education lecture/discussion.

There are other problems with the current evaluation tool. The results of the evaluation are given too late in the academic year for the instructor to make any major changes in her current parent education classes. Changes might be made in the following year, but this is too late for the current parents to benefit from them. The

parent education instructors need ongoing immediate feedback throughout the year on how the parents are learning, and what they are learning, from the parent education lecture and discussion component.

In addition, the rating scale on the current evaluation is too nonspecific to inform the instructor about what needs to be improved. For example, if "Needs to Improve" is checked, this does not give the instructor any information as to what is needed to be improved. Also, does this mean that the whole way of teaching the parent education topic needs to improve, or just one part of it. Also, as this evaluation is only given once a year, does the "Needs to Improve" rating refer to all the parent education topics given throughout the year, or just to one or two specific topics.

Instructors have found that, over the years, using the current evaluation tool, their ratings usually come out about the same. Therefore, if they decide to present a new topic for parent education, or try a different way of bringing information into the class, this evaluation tool is too gross to give them specific and pertinent information on whether they were effective in trying new methods of teaching or presenting new information to their class.

The current evaluation tool does not tell parent education instructors as to whether they are reaching the parent's goals for taking the class. There are several questions in the evaluation relating to the parent's goals for their children being in the class, but none for the parent's as individuals. Child outcomes are accounted for but not parent outcomes.

Several problems exist that have to be overcome before a new outcome assessment tool can be implemented with the parents in the program. At present, the parent education program at the community college does not have training for its instructors in outcome assessment. In planning and implementing outcome assessment the parent education instructors at the community college need to be involved from the very beginning. One of the first steps in the planning process is to define the goals and objectives of the parent education program and also for each parent education topic to be taught.

The first objective of this practicum proposal is to involve the parent education staff in the planning process for parent outcome assessment. A second objective is to provide informational training in outcome assessment to the parent education staff to help them implement this evaluation method in their individual classes.

One of the main reasons for the lack of outcome assessment in the parent education program, is the paucity of information readily available on outcome assessment in parent education. Within the community college there is no one specifically trained to assist and develop outcome assessment techniques for the parent education program. There is also no money available to bring in outside expert assistance. With not much information externally and little assistance internally, it has been difficult for the parent education program to get started on working on outcome assessment.

Another important factor that contributes to the lack of outcome assessment in the parent education program at the community college is that all the instructors in the program work part-time

and are paid for the number of hours they are in direct contact with parents. Training in, and developing new methods of, handling evaluation within the program takes time for which the instructors do not get paid. Therefore, the tendency has been in the past to continue with the status quo and to not to ask the instructors to attend planning and training workshops on their own time.

There also exists a certain amount of resistance to change in the parent education program by the instructors. The evaluation methods that are used at the present time have been used for many years, and the parent education instructors are familiar and comfortable with them, even they may have outlived their usefulness to them in some areas. In addition, outcome assessment techniques, as opposed to short evaluations done by the parents in the program once a year, may take more time for the instructors to give and assess. As many instructors feel that they are already burdened by an overload of paperwork that interferes with their main task of working with families, they are likely to be unreceptive to new methods of assessment. The parents, too, dislike filling out evaluation forms as this takes time away from their interaction with other parents in the classroom and from them being involved in their child's preschool activities. Therefore, the outcome assessment methods chosen will have to be simple, easy to use, and short. The technique used definitely must not be time consuming for either the parents and the parent education instructors.

One of the goals of the parent education program at the community college is to provide assistance in helping the parent education instructors in improving their skills in teaching and

working with families in their classes. The current evaluation method does not completely assist the instructors to reach this goal. The move towards family support goals in the parent education program has led instructors to want more information on parent outcome in their programs, rather than focusing almost entirely on child oriented outcomes. A new evaluation instrument is needed to provide specific, measurable feedback on parent outcome to instructors.

The community college is requiring outcome assessment for all its programs to enable them to provide evidence of the program's effectiveness. The continuation of the program at the community college with regard to staffing and funding may well depend on implementing a workable parent outcome assessment.

Therefore,despite the problems listed above, it is planned to develop and implement a new method of evaluation, outcome assessment, in the future (along with the current evaluation method) in parent education at the community college.

This assessment tool should be able to provide information to the college administrator's as to the effectiveness of the parent education program in working with parents. It should also provide feedback to the individual parent education instructors as to whether they are teaching parents effectively in their parent education classes, and whether they are empowering parents to use the information taught in their families.

CHAPTER III

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

In recent years, there has been much pressure on higher education establishments to explain what they are trying to do, and to demonstrate how well they are doing it. Most colleges of higher education have some form of outcome assessment. Also in recent years, in the field of family support, there has been a lot written about the need to have good documentation on a family support programs' effectiveness in order for them to find financial support, to replicate good programs, and to continually improve their work with families. Therefore, on two fronts, parent education instructors teaching classes to parents in community colleges are being challenged to demonstrate how effective they are in teaching parents, and to document this by means of outcome assessment. The main problem in tackling this challenge is the lack of information in the literature on outcome assessment in the parent education field.

The goals of this practicum are (1), to develop an instrument that will measure parents' learning in a parent education class, and (2), to examine what learning takes place.

Objective (1)

To develop an instrument to measure the amount the parents have learned, retained and implemented from the parent education lecture/discussion taught by the parent education instructor in the classroom. The instrument will be administered to parents and it will be scored by instructors to show how well the parents have learned the material. Parents will perceive that the instrument has

reflected with reasonable accuracy their knowledge of the parent education topic as reasonably accurately or better on a four point rating scale devised by the author (Appendix E). This instrument will be called the Classroom Assessment Technique (CAT 1).

Objective (2)

To demonstrate that three quarters (75%) of the parent education instructors using the Classroom Assessment Technique (CAT 1) will rate the technique useful or better on the rating scale on the assessment questionnaire devised by the author (Appendix D). This assessment questionnaire will be filled out by each parent education instructor after they have finished using the Classroom Assessment Technique in their parent education class.

Objective (3)

To measure, by using the Classroom Assessment Technique, how much parents have learned from the parent education lecture and discussion:

(a) immediately after being taught the topic in the classroom by the parent education instructor

(b) one month after attending the class. This will be tested in the parent education classroom by the parent education instructor

(c) whether they have used the information learned from the class to change their parenting behavior in a positive way within the context of their family. The parents will be assessed by the parent education instructor in the classroom one month after the the parent education topic was presented.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Review of existing programs, models, and approaches

Many Americans still feel that parenting is an instinct and that families do not need much in the way of outside help or advice on parenting. Parent education programs, despite their long history in this country, are still questioned as to their efficacy by many policy makers, funding agencies, and, sometimes, even by the parents they want to serve. As there are so many different types of parent education programs it is often difficult to find out about the effectiveness of different strategies for educating parents. There are parent education programs run by schools, hospitals, health centers, child care centers, mental health agencies, churches, libraries, colleges and universities, and other organizations that have parent education as their goal. All these serve a wide variety of parents, and include people who care for children, such as grandparents. All these programs, although they are family support programs, vary, not only in who they serve, but also in what they do, and how support and services are provided to families (Powell, 1988).

Studies on the effectiveness of parent education programs have found positive short term effects on children (Weiss & Jacobs, 1988). However, program effects on parents have not been studied as much as child effects (Weiss, 1983). Unfortunately methodological weaknesses were found in many of these parent outcome studies, Powell (1986). So far, there is mixed evidence that any one particular

program is significantly more effective than another (Weiss, 1983; Powell, 1983; Harmon & Brim, 1980).

Harmon & Brim (1980) state that "across a broad range of programs and types of participants, programs that include parent education have shown small but important effects on parents and their children". Wandersman (1987) lists some of the short-term beneficial effects of parent education, such as greater maternal warmth and skill, more appropriate responsiveness of parents, less nonparticipation of fathers in child care, and a lower incidence of child abuse and neglect. Some of the long-term effects of parent education are higher educational achievement of parents and less welfare support, and better marital adjustment.

These findings raise questions about the role of curriculum in parent education programs. Not every program model will work with every parent. The teenage single parent will need a very different program compared with a suburban, college educated, career parent. Many programs models that are well liked by middle-class parents (such as STEP) do not appeal to low income parents. More research is needed to find out more about the matching of family values and other factors to program structure.

Powell (1986) states that the biggest challenge ahead for researchers is to match program content and structure to the needs and characteristics of parents. In particular, Powell feels that there is a real need for studies on the efficacy of programs involving middle class parents.

Weiss (1983) states that, in order to know if a program "works", we need to know what works, when, for whom, how and why.

She goes on to state that to do this new measurement tools and a broadening of the evaluation methodology will have to be developed.

In the 1990's educational reformers began asking two fundamental questions (1) How well are students learning? and (2) How effectively are teachers teaching? These questions are being addressed by using outcome assessment techniques. Outcome assessment is being used in the field of parent education to answer the questions: what are parents learning and how effective are parent educators in getting their learning goals for parents over to the parents themselves?

The questions asked by educators above, and the future direction family support was moving towards in the area of evaluation of its programs, has led the parent education program at the community college to rethink its previous methods of evaluation. To do this, new tools and methods of evaluation are going to have to be developed than had been used before in the program. To obtain more information on outcome assessment, other parent education programs needed to be looked at.

The Minnesota Early Childhood Family Education Program planned and ran a Parent Outcome Interview Study, Cooke (1992), from February 1990 to June 1991, to document the effects of the program on parent participants. They used a non-intrusive, open-ended interview process using straightforward, understandable questions for the parents to answer. A set of interview questions was developed to be asked of all parents new to the program prior to, and at the end of participation, during the 1990 - 91 school year. The questions focused on basic elements of change likely to occur for parents in

Early Childhood Family Education programs across the state. The evaluation process was part of the regular everyday program and involved program staff in data collection and analysis. The interview process, which consisted of a set of questions, was given only to new parents to the program, and was given twice: once before entrance to the program and again after two or three quarters participation in the program. When all the interview material was collected at the end of the year, the staff were trained in decoding the types of "no change" and "change" responses from preprogram to postprogram interviews. The results showed that parents may indeed come to the program with some basic knowledge about their children and child development, but they appeared to gain not only more knowledge in many cases, but also a better understanding of how to apply their knowledge to everyday parent-child and family interaction situations. The results of the outcome study showed positive changes in approximately two thirds of the parents in the groups of parents surveyed.

The Minnesota Early Childhood Family Education Program is a voluntary public school program for all Minnesota families with children between the ages of birth and kindergarten. More that 213,000 young children and their parents participated in the program in 1990 - 1991, encompassing 98% of of the families with young children in the state. Funded by $26 million in state aid and local levies, it is the nation's oldest and largest program of its kind. The Minnesota Early Childhood Family Education Parent Outcome Interview Study was an ambitious project with a large budget, which used paid professionals for advice and leadership. It is part of a

comprehensive evaluation plan for the whole program. It was conducted over a statewide area and with a variety of parenting programs.

This Parent Outcome Interview Study was very labor intensive. The interview, when the questions were asked the parents, took about 30 minutes each time, and were tape recorded. These were transcribed verbatim for analysis. The staff working on the data analysis were quoted as using words like "tedious" and overwhelming" about the process. The staff also said that the analysis of the replies to the questions given the parents required them to make "judgement calls", even though the data was checked by at least three people. The staff who worked on the study were also concerned about parents giving what they felt were "socially acceptable" answers to the questions. The main criticism of this study is that the results relied on subjective judgements of the parents' answers by the staff doing the data analysis.

MELD (The Minnesota Early Learning Design), (Ellwood, 1988), offers support and education to parents in a variety of situations. The programs aims to help parents establish support networks involving not only other parents, but also various community resources, and to provide them with timely, accurate, age-specific, and unbiased child rearing information. The funders and evaluation consultants were interested in MELD doing a parental behavior outcome evaluation. They wanted MELD to prove that the program made a measurable difference in the lives of the participants. After coming up with measurable objectives that were to be evaluated over a two year period, MELD abandoned this evaluation method after one

year. This was because there was less and less interest in the evaluation from the staff, as the staff became more interested in the process of positive parenting. Also the evaluation study with its volunteers and forms that needed to be completed was intrusive in the program. MELD was also not willing to provide a control group of parents, as it would mean denying services to a group of parents. Finally the composition of the group of parents (and facilitators) changed considerably over the period studied. Also, the uniformity of treatment for all parent groups (which was one of the parameters of the evaluation) could not be adhered to, as each program group set their own agendas.

After one year, the design was abandoned and MELD adopted in its place, extensive 2 hour interviews with every couple in the program. Consultants were hired to do some of the testing, for example, developmental testing on the children. Using a mix of attendance records, application forms, parent interviews, and developmental testing, MELD concluded that their program was working well. However, MELD felt that, over the two years, that they had learnt more about the process of evaluation that the program itself.

One of the reasons for the problems MELD encountered in doing an outcome evaluation was that the program was new and developing, and in a phase of self-definition. Another reason was that the evaluation methods currently in use did not provide measurements of the positive parenting behaviors that were so important to the program.

MELD then went on to try to define measures of positive parenting behaviors, but found other experts in the field hesitated

to endorse it. Using a questionnaire that included more common, gross indicators of parenting outcomes, MELD gave this to every parent at the beginning and end of their two years with the program. In the second year of this evaluation study MELD shifted to looking at the assessing the actual delivery of services (which were support and education). In both the above evaluation phases, external evaluators were used.

In the third evaluation phase MELD developed their own evaluation procedures, an internal process, using data and forms from the previous two phases. However, within 6 months, the evaluation coordinators' enthusiasm dwindled, mainly due to the fact that an internal evaluation was not felt to be professional enough, did not have enough credibility. Also the staff in MELD were chosen to be "people oriented" not "paper oriented", and they already felt overworked without the extra burden of questionnaires and forms to be filled out. MELD is currently using a mixture of formal and informal evaluation methods for outcome evaluation, but feels its biggest mistake was in mixing program development and outcome evaluation.

The Brookline Early Education Project (BEEP) was started in 1972 as a research and demonstration project delivering services to families with preschool children. The Project had as its overall goal, three sets of interrelated services: parent education and support, diagnostic monitoring, and educational plans for the children. It was a carefully evaluated program.

There were three levels of parent education to which families were randomly assigned. The most intensive involved home visits,

meetings and child care. The moderate level offered the same support but less frequently. The least intensive level involved no outreach through home visits, meetings or child care, but information and support was made available but the parents had to seek these services out. All other services were offered equally to all three groups.

The evaluation did not have a control group that received no services. The program did test children who were not born in the year for the enrollment period for entry into BEEP. Later, in school, children were tested who were classmates of children who had participated in BEEP. This provided two small control groups for the children. However it was difficult for the evaluators to find a heterogeneous group of families for the control groups that matched the families that were in the BEEP program. This led to later problems in evaluating the results of the outcome evaluation.

The assessment techniques used by BEEP were many, from standardized measures of development, intelligence tests, school readiness measures, teacher rating scales and instruments for directly observing children's behavior.

The BEEP program was looking mainly at child outcomes. The results showed that the BEEP children consistently showed better social behavior and use of classroom time in kindergarten. These benefits extended into second grade. However, many other test given the children failed to show any major differences between the control groups and the BEEP participants.

However some interesting results were obtained on the long term effects on the families with regard to the level of parent

education services provided. For the well educated families in the BEEP program, the amount of parent education services made no difference to how the children in these families performed later in school. For the less educated families it was indicated that the more intensive service levels were necessary. The results on the low level parent education participation were indecisive.

BEEP reported that there were many lessons to be learnt from doing this assessment. Firstly, they had too many goals which made it difficult for evaluators to focus resources on the most important issues. They recommend that small-scale projects focus on a few key issues. BEEP also suffered from the limitations of traditional outcome measures. They recommend that programs develop new approaches to measuring outcomes that the program considers important.

BEEP reported that they did not find the big effects of their intervention that they hoped for. The results showed that the actual measured effects are likely to be small, difficult to detect, and unevenly distributed across participants. They will also vary across different outcome areas.

One of the main benefits of the BEEP assessment project was that it gave them a realistic view of how families participate in and benefit from early education and parent education.

Community college parent education directors across the state are currently working on ways to evaluate parent outcome in their programs. Although no formal studies have yet been carried out, at the present time some small, pilot, studies have been done on parts of the outcome measures project that is still in its planning stage.

In this project the parent education administrators broke down parent education into its many components for the purpose of doing outcome assessment.. For each of these listed the many ways in which that specific outcome could be observed or measured. Many of these components are still in the process of being formulated and finalized at the present time.

For example, one of the goals for the parent education program was to eliminate biased attitudes in parents/students for gender and sexism; race and ethnicity; disabilities and differently abled people. For the race and ethnicity component, some the outcomes that were evaluated in a pilot study were: parent was not afraid to sit beside another person of a different race. Parent talks to another parent of a different race. Parent enjoys learning about other cultures. Parent tastes snack foods provided by a parent from a different culture. Parent shows respect for religious celebrations from another culture. Parent borrows books, tapes, videos on other cultures, and so on. All these activities were chosen because they were observable and measurable in the classroom.

The main problem is that the parents have to be observed over the whole period of time they are in the classroom and for the full length of time they are in the program, maybe for one year. The parent education instructors who are doing the observations find that this takes a large amount of their time, both to observe the parents and write down the data. Also the instructors are concerned that they sometimes miss some of the parents' appropriate behaviors by not being in the room or being distracted by another parent or

child. Also, some of the outcomes may occur outside of the classroom and not be observed.

This is an interesting method of evaluating parent outcome that has yet to be developed into its final form. It is not expensive to operate but is time consuming for the staff. If outside observers were used then the cost of the process would increase, but the results might prove to be more accurate.

The current evaluation method (Appendix A) used in the parent education program at the community college is a new one, developed this year, to supersede one that the college did not like because it did not focus entirely on the parent education instructor. This new evaluation consists of 20 questions that are checked on a four point scale, from "Unsatisfactory" to "Definite Strength". There is also room at the end of the evaluation for written comments. The evaluation is given once towards the end of the academic year, and is filled out anonymously by the parents in the parent education classes.

The current evaluation method used in the parent education program asks questions of the parents about the many facets of the parent education instructor's job. However, in the specific area of the parent education lecture and discussion session, which the instructor is required to do weekly in the Child Study Laboratory classes and once a month in the Cooperative Preschool classes, there are only six questions out of twenty that focus on the instructor's teaching role.

Question 1 asks if the instructor provides information on normal child growth and behavior. This is important information for

the parents to remember and use. The information on growth and behavior could be given to the parents in several different ways: during conference time, by means of handouts, by guest speakers, using films and videos, using posters, by informal communication and by lecture/discussion format. Therefore the rating given on this question could refer to any of the methods used listed above and does not give the instructor feedback on which method was the most effective in disseminating the information to the parents.

Question 5 asks if the instructor facilitates an effective group discussion, but does not define what effective means. Does this mean that the parent remembers the material discussed, or does it mean that the parent acted on the material discussed, or both of these? Again, the information garnered from the evaluation does not clearly inform the parent educator in what way she was effective or not effective. Question 6 ("Does the instructor adapt discussion topics and methods to the needs of the group"), suffers from the same lack of specifics that would be helpful to the instructor.

Question 7 asks if the instructor provides information and raises issues about parenting and family life to stimulate and extend interest. However, it does not ask if that interest extends beyond the classroom and is used in everyday family life by the parents.

Questions 8 and 9 rate the skills the instructor has of speaking clearly and presenting information in an interesting and concise manner. These are all skills that all good teachers should have, without these skills it would be difficult to do a good job of imparting information to the parents. But this evaluation does not

relate the lack of these skills to the parents not learning or not using information on parenting.

Moreover, this evaluation questionnaire in current use does not give the instructor specific information about what the parents are learning from each individual parent education lecture and discussion or if they are using this specific information in parenting. The evaluation gives a small amount of information to the instructor on how well she is teaching, but only in a general way over a period of an entire year. It does not give immediate feedback on teaching a specific class. If the rating is low (or high) on any of the questions listed above it is difficult for the parent education instructor to know whether this applies to everything she taught during the year, or just one or two topics. Immediate outcome assessment methods will provide feedback straight away to the parent education instructor on whether the parents in that class are learning the specific learning goals that the instructor has planned for the class. If the parents have not understood these learning goals, then the instructor needs to change her method and approach for teaching that topic.

This is particularly helpful when a parent education instructor is new to the program and needs to have plenty of feedback from many sources, for example, from supervision and evaluation, about her teaching styles and goals. It is also useful when a parent education instructor is teaching a new topic for the first time, or when she is teaching a new group of parents. The results of the outcome assessment can help a parent education instructor make mid-course corrections and not wait until the end of

the year for another source of feedback on how she is doing as teacher of parent education.

The community college is a teaching institution and, as such, is interested in the basic two questions mentioned before: how well are students learning and how effectively are teachers teaching. The current evaluation method does not answer those questions effectively. The immediate feedback the outcome assessment tool will provide pertinent information to the community college on the teaching objectives for each parent education class, plus some statistics on how many parents have learnt those objectives and acted upon the learned information.

From the above review of some existing parent education programs using outcome assessment techniques, a solution strategy can be generated. The parent education program at the community college is an established one, so it is ready for outcome assessment. The program will have to use an internal evaluation technique as it does not have the funds for an external evaluation. It will be governed by time constraints as the parent population of its programs lasts eight months only. No control group can be used as all parents expect to receive services which they have paid for. The collection of data has to relatively simple as only one person will be coordinating and analyzing the results of the outcome assessment.

Description of solution strategy

At the community college there is one parent education model, a model similar to the Minnesota Early Childhood Family Education

program, which is a cooperative preschool parent education program. The community college parent education program is part of a state wide parent education program serving 20,000 families. To date there has been no state wide evaluation done on parent outcome studies. The community college serves approximately 1,300 families and no money is budgeted to assess parent outcome at this time.

Although the preprogram and postprogram interview method used in the Minnesota Early Childhood Family Education Program would have been an interesting outcome assessment method to replicate to assess parent outcome in the community college parent education program, the college did not have the paid staff time to implement this, nor the budget to provide several days of staff time to analyze the results. Therefore the planned outcome assessment at the community college had to be inexpensive to implement, and to take as little staff time as possible to carry out and analyze.

To resolve the shortcomings of the current evaluation method of the parent education program at the community college, the following plan for outcome assessment was proposed. To develop and test a simple Classroom Assessment Technique that could be easily used by the parent education instructors in the classroom with the parents they teach. Firstly, this assessment technique will give the instructor information on how much the parents already know about the planned parent education topic to be taught. Secondly, it will give the instructor immediate feedback on whether they have taught the parents the specific objectives they planned for the topic. Thirdly, the technique will inform the instructor whether the parents have retained the information taught up to one month later.

Fourthly, the final piece of information provided to the instructor will be, whether the parents have used the information in any way during the previous month. The purpose of this assessment technique is to provide feedback to the instructor on how well the parents are learning and implementing parent education information, and how effectively are instructors teaching parent education.

The selected instrument to test outcome assessment that was developed was a Classroom Assessment Technique that was simple to use for both the instructor and the parents, and one that took only a small amount of time to implement.

This Classroom Assessment Technique was to consist of three questionnaires to be given to the parents in the parent education classroom before, after, and one month after a parent education lecture was given by an instructor. Each questionnaire would consist of the same four questions on the parent education topic. The parent education instructor would develop the questions to reflect her main objectives for her parent education topic. Additional questions on the questionnaires would be added to give information about the parents' use of the parent education material taught, and on the parents' assessment of their current knowledge of the parent education topic. Each instructor would be asked to fill out a survey form (Appendix D) on the Classroom Assessment Technique to assess its usefulness to the parent education instructor. See Appendix F for the calendar of the outcome assessment project.

The parent education instructors at the community college meet twice a month for two hours for a business meeting and inservice training. At one of these meetings 25 parent education instructors

were given a training session on the outcome assessment project. Firstly, they had a short presentation on the goals, objectives and timeline of the outcome assessment project (see Appendix F). Then the classroom assessment tool (CAT 1), and their role in using it, was explained. The instruction sheet (Appendix B) was given to each instructor which explained how to implement the Classroom Assessment Technique.

The next part of the training session for the parent education instructors consisted of a demonstration, with examples, of how to write goals and objectives for parent education topics. The instructors then broke into small groups (divided by the age of the children in their preschool/parent education classes), For example, instructors working with parents of infants and one year olds were in one group. Instructors working with parents of two year olds in another group, and so on. In these small groups each instructor chose one parent education topic she planned to teach during the following month, and the small group brainstormed suggestions for two goals for each of the topics, and two objectives for each goal.

These four objectives were to be converted by the instructor into four questions about the parent education topic which were to be asked the parents on three occasions. Firstly on a pretest questionnaire, to be given to the parents just before the parent education topic is presented, to test the level of knowledge of the topic of the parents in the class. Secondly, the four questions will be asked again on the posttest questionnaire, which will be given directly after the topic is given by the parent education instructor. Thirdly, the same four questions will be asked the

parents one month later to test the level of retention by the parents in the class of the parent education material taught.

The object of this small group session was not to have the instructor have the final list of objectives and questions for her parent education topic completed, but to gain some ideas and suggestions from the group to assist her in preparing her own goals, objectives and questions for her parent education lecture and discussion.

At the end of the training session, the parent education instructors were asked if they would like to participate in the outcome assessment project with one of their parent education classes. It was explained that participation had to be, of necessity, voluntary as there was no money to pay them for their time. A sign up sheet was passed out for instructors to sign if they wanted to participate. Fourteen instructors signed up, one of whom dropped out at a later date. Three instructors signed up to participate with two parent education classes. This made sixteen parent education classes to be assessed by the Classroom Assessment Technique. By chance, these sixteen classes were distributed throughout the range of ages of children in the preschool component of the parent education program.

The parent education instructors who had volunteered were asked to hand in their completed list of four questions for parents that reflected the four objectives for their chosen parent education topic before, or at, the next instructor staff meeting that was in two weeks time. This information was to be filled out on the Outcome

Assessment Project Form (Appendix C) by each instructor who volunteered to be part of the the outcome assessment project.

One week after the training meeting, each parent education instructor in the outcome assessment project was contacted by telephone to make sure that they understood the goals and implementation of the project. In particular, each instructor was checked to see if they had any problems in writing up their four questions for their parent education topic. The instructors were reminded to fill out the outcome assessment project form and to hand it in in one week.

The instructors were asked how they identified their goals and objectives, and how they formulated their questions. The instructors could be divided into two groups. Each group had a different method for handling this task. The first group started by very carefully writing down all the goals for their parent education talk, and then identifying the two they felt were the most important and relevant to the planned topic. In some cases, the instructor put two or three goals together to make one larger goal. Then the instructors wrote down all the objectives under each goal, and again identified the two most important that would be definitely covered in the parent education talk. These four objectives were then turned into question form, although in some cases the questions had to be simplified for the parent questionnaire.

The second group of instructors worked in the reverse way. They thought about four questions that they would like parents to be able to answer after participating in the parent education lecture/discussion. They then took these questions and put them

under some goal headings. At this point they sometimes had too many goals, and sometimes the questions came under one goal only. The instructors then played around a bit with the questions until they had four questions that reflected two major goals for their topic. The objectives were then fitted in between which sometimes resulted in the questions being reworded slightly for the questionnaire. .

These outcome assessment forms were collected from all the participating instructors and the four questions for each instructor's class were typed up three times. Each set of questions was printed on a different color paper and were numbered OA 1, OA 2 and OA 3 (Outcome Assessment 1, Outcome Assessment 2 etc.). The first set of questions (OA 1) was to be the pretest, the second set (OA 2) was the posttest. These sets of questions were to be given to the parents to answer just before, and right after, the parent education topic was presented. The third set of questions (OA 3) was to be given as a follow up test to the parents one month after the parents have participated in the parent education lecture/discussion session.

After each set of four questions an extra question was added for the parents to answer on each of the three questionnaires. This question was "The answers I have given to the questions listed above accurately reflect my knowledge of the above topic (circle one): Agree, Somewhat agree, Somewhat disagree, Disagree". This was added to check that the answers to the questions asked on the questionnaire represented, within reason, the parents' range of knowledge of the parent education topic.

On the follow up test another question was added to check the parents' use of the information from the parent education lecture. The question stated: "How much have you used the information from the parent education talk (the title of the topic) at home during the past month to improve your parenting and/or personal skills?" The parent was asked to check a four point scale: "Very much, A lot, A little, Not at all". See the example questionnaire in Appendix E.

A survey form was developed (see Appendix D) for the parent education instructors to fill out at the end of the Classroom Assessment Technique. This was to provide feedback on the usefulness of the technique, along with comments from the instructors on whether they received helpful feedback from the technique and would make changes in the future in their teaching methods for that topic.

The three sets of questions were returned to the individual instructors, together with the survey form, along with a sheet of procedural instructions on how to handle the questionnaires with the parents when they handed them out just before giving their parent education lecture.

The instructions stated that the parent education instructors should give very little information to the parents about the questionnaires. In particular, the instructors were told not to tell the parents that they would be asked the identical questions again immediately after the parent education talk and again one month later. The instructors were particularly told not to tell the parents that they would be asked in the future if they had used the parent education information from the talk. The instructors were

reminded that the questionnaires were to be filled out anonymously, no names of parents were needed.

During the next four to six weeks the Classroom Assessment Technique was implemented in the parent education program at the community college. In each participating parent education classroom the parents answered the first set of questions (OA 1), if they could, and handed back the questionnaire to the instructor. The instructor then taught the parent education class. At the end of class, the second set of identical questions (OA 2) were passed out to the parents, who then tried to answer the questions. The questionnaires were collected by the instructor. The instructor later scored the answers to the questions on both questionnaires and put the total correct (TC) out of a possible four, at the bottom of each questionnaire. See Appendix E for a sample questionnaire.

Each individual instructor was contacted between when they gave their parent education lecture and the follow up test to check if everything was running smoothly or if there were any questions or comments on the implementation of the assessment technique. The instructors were reminded of the date of their upcoming follow up test. They were also reminded to fill out the survey form (Appendix D) with comments at the end of the project and to hand this in promptly together with the questionnaires.

Four to six weeks later, during the parent education classtime, the instructor handed out the third questionnaire (OA 3) to the parents who were in the original parent education class and asked them to answer the questions again. The instructor collected

these questionnaires from the parents and later scored the number of questions answered correctly.

Each instructor filled out the survey form (Appendix D) and returned it, together with the three sets of scored questionnaires from the parents in her class. This information was collected for all the instructors taking part in the assessment outcome project. The scores were analyzed in various ways from the pre, post and follow up questionnaires.

The information and data collected from the outcome project will be written up in two ways. The first method will be for the parent education instructors with the data from the outcome assessment project broken down by individual parent education classes. The comments from the instructors on the project will be reported in detail, along with the feedback from the instructor survey form. The information will be also written in report form, with attached data sheets, for the Director of the Parent Education Program and the Chairperson of the Educational Development Division at the community college. A report will be written for the Community College Assessment Yearbook, 1994.

The advantages of using the Classroom Assessment Technique are as follows. Parent education instructors are part-time employees of the community college. They have a large amount of work to do in the time they are in contact with the parents in their classes (see the job description in Chapter I). The instrument used in this project, by necessity, could not be time consuming for the parent education instructors to develop, to use, to give to the parents, and to collect and assess the results. The parents in the classes are also

not willing to spend time on questionnaires and evaluations. They pay for the class and have other goals for the time they spend in the classroom. The same parameters for the assessment technique of quickness and easiness of use applies to the parents as well as the instructors.

It was anticipated that the Classroom Assessment Technique would take the instructors no more that one to two hours to plan and write the questions to ask the parents about their parent education topic. It was also predicted that it would take approximately fifteen to twenty minutes for the instructor to give out and collect the questionnaires from the parents in the classroom on each of the three occasions. The instructors were told to allow about fifteen minutes for the parents to fill out each questionnaire. It was estimated that the time to check the three questionnaires for correct answers for each parent in the class would take the instructor about an an hour.

The second justification to use a technique such as this, is that the parents in these classes are mostly educated middle class parents who are comfortable doing written questionnaires. However, it was decided to keep the number of questions to four, as many more questions than this number would seem to be in the form of a test and also take too much time from the parent education lecture.

Another advantage of an assessment technique with immediate feedback to the instructor, is that changes and adjustments can be made very promptly by the instructor to her teaching methods and content of her lecture. The instructor can go back to the parents in the class the following week and deal with any misconceptions about

the topic and go over any areas which have not been fully understood. An evaluation that comes back to the instructor at the end of the year does not provide feedback in a timely manner for all the individual parent education topics taught throughout the year. Duckett (1985) states that feedback for teachers should come in a personal and continuous form throughout the year, not once a year on a form placed in the instructor's box. This assessment technique provides immediate individual feedback.

The classes at the community college are run on a quarterly basis with three quarters in the year. Although there is little turnover of parents throughout the year, a classroom technique was chosen that could be used within approximately one quarter (eleven weeks), to provide the continuity of responses within each parent class. Therefore the follow up period for this project was chosen to be one month, although this Classroom Assessment Technique could be used with a longer follow up period without any problems.

The parent education program of the community college has 1,300 parents enrolled in 61 classes spread across six school districts and a wide geographical area, so it would have been difficult for one person to implement the outcome assessment technique even with one quarter of these classes during the time span of the project. Therefore, it was deemed necessary to use the network of parent education instructors to carry out the Classroom Assessment Technique in the parent education classrooms.

The bi-weekly parent education instructor staff meetings were an ideal time and place to conduct a training session for the instructors on how to use the Classroom Assessment Technique. Using

the parent education instructors in doing the Classroom Assessment Technique involved the instructors on a more personal level in outcome assessment. The training session helped them to formulate specific goals and objectives for their parent education class, and hopefully, gave them skills to use for other parent education classes in the future.

Using this assessment tool, each instructor received immediate feedback from the questionnaires about her own teaching, the evaluation results were not funnelled through someone else or collated on a computerized form. The instructor was informed within a short period whether the parents were utilizing the information from the parent education lecture.

Other options of testing parent outcome were considered. The individual interview method as used in the Minnesota Early Childhood Family Education Program was time consuming and expensive. The community college does not have the finances from the state to support this type of evaluation.

Another technique that was considered for testing the learning of material taught in parent education classes, was the picture description method where the parent is shown, for example, a picture of a parent child conflict and asked how he or she would handle it. The parent is asked this question before taking the parent education class or classes, and afterwards. This method provides rather subjective results, and is very time consuming for the instructors to do with a large number of parents. Some parent education topics do not lend themselves well to this type of technique.

One disadvantage of the Classroom Assessment Technique proposed for this practicum is that the pretest method used could show that there is a ceiling effect (Anderson and Murphy, 1977). A test is said to have a ceiling affect if many of those taking the test score at, or near, the maximum. This may be due to the questions on the test being too easy, or it may mean that the instructor has underestimated the knowledge of the parents on that particular subject. Whatever the reason, the results on the posttest are not going to show much increase in questions answered correctly if the ceiling effect is in place, and valid conclusions about the effectiveness of the classroom presentation by the instructor become difficult.

One criticism of using pretest questions which reflect the objectives of the topic about to be taught, is that this can cue the learner into focusing onto those specific areas during the presentation of the topic, and therefore they are more likely to be remembered and test out well on the posttest. If this does improve student learning (and this assessment technique is not testing for this) then maybe it can be incorporated into future lectures. Angelo (1993) comments in an article on fourteen general, research-based principles for improving higher learning in our classrooms, states that learning is helped when students know ahead what the major landmarks are for what is to be learned. He also states that a pretest helps the instructor to know the level of the student's knowledge and helps the instructor find an appropriate starting point for the lecture. The pretest could assist the instructor in improving her teaching skills if the pretest were given to the

parents far enough before the lecture for the instructor to see the results. In this project, the pretest will be given immediately before the lecture; this project is not planning to have the instructor change the level of her talk because of the results of the pretest.

The disadvantage of using a posttest both immediately and follow up, is the practice effect (Anderson & Murphy, 1977). The practice effect means that taking a test on one occasion will often improve the later scores on that test. One way of handling this to use control groups and have one group of parents just take an immediate posttest and the other group of parents only take the follow up test. In this project it was decided not to complicate the procedure and therefore control groups were not used. However, if this Classroom Assessment Technique is found to be useful tool for the parent education instructors, a further study could be planned using the same Classroom Assessment Technique with control groups to prevent a practice effect taking place.

CHAPTER V

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Action Taken and Results

Parent education instructors at the community college needed prompt feedback on the effects and effectiveness of the teaching component of their job. Information was also sought as to whether the parents in the parent education program were using the information from the parent education lectures. The current evaluation tool used in the parent education program did not provide this information. A Classroom Assessment Technique was developed to provide the parent education instructors with quick feedback as to how well parents were learning, retaining and implementing parent education information. The instructors were asked to rate the usefulness of this Classroom Assessment Technique.

Instructors in the Parent Education Program at the Community College participated in the outcome assessment project during the months of March, April and May, 1994. Parents in sixteen parent education classes were surveyed by thirteen instructors using a Classroom Assessment Technique. All age groups of classes offered by the parent education program at the college, from parents of infants through to parents of five year olds, were represented in the survey. There were over 300 parents enrolled in the 16 classes surveyed for the outcome assessment project of whom 228 parents participated in the pretest. The community college parent education program has a total of 1,300 parents enrolled in a total of 61 parent education classes.

Implementation of the outcome assessment project ran fairly smoothly throughout the twelve week implementation period, however a few changes were made as the project progressed.

The first change that was made was to allow the parent education instructors to give the pretest questionnaire up to one week before presenting their parent education lecture instead of immediately before the lecture. The reason for this was that the first few instructors who participated in using the pretest and posttest were fairly vocal in saying that they did not have enough time to do both the pretest and posttest and give their parent education talk all at one meeting. As a result of this lack of time, some parents had to leave the meeting before the end of the lecture when the posttest was to be handed out. The instructors also reported that the parents in their classes were upset that time was being taken away from their parent education discussion/lecture by doing two sets of questionnaires at one meeting. As a result, some parents were not filling out the posttest to the best of their ability.

Although the Classroom Assessment Technique had been designed to consume as little time as possible, and each questionnaire only took 5 to 15 minutes to fill out (as reported by the instructors), two questionnaires at one meeting was deemed too time consuming, and the decision was made to give the instructors in the remaining untested classes the option of giving the parents the pretest ahead of time. The posttest was still given immediately after the parent education lecture. This seemed to work much better, and was less

stressful for the instructor, and parents seemed more willing to comply.

A second problem that occurred during implementation came about because the instructors were told at the training session and in the information package on the Classroom Assessment Technique, not to tell parents very much about this outcome project. The reason for this was that it was felt that if the parents were told that they would be asked the same questions again at a later date they might discuss the answers among themselves or refer to notes or handouts before the posttest and follow up test were given. Therefore it would not be an accurate test of their retention of the class material. Also if the parents were told ahead of time that they would be asked if they had used the information from the class in some ways to enhance their parenting skills during the few weeks after the class was taught, it was felt that the parents might feel obligated to use the information. The results of the survey on the parents' use of the parent education information would, therefore, not accurately represent a typical scenario.

Because of the above reasons, the instructors were told not to tell the parents that there would be a second and third set of the same questions. In particular, the instructors were told not to tell the parents that they would be asked, in several week's time, if they had used the parent education information taught in the class. Consequently, as a result of this, many of the parents objected to being asked the same four questions three times. Some parents wanted to know why they were doing this. Some instructors felt that by not informing the parents from the very beginning

about the project they lost some parents from the survey. Some parents did not fill out the questionnaires the second and third time around as they could not see the point.

The implementation of the project was not changed due to these comments by instructors about parents' reactions.

Another question that came up during the implementation of the outcome assessment project was with reference to marking the questions right or wrong. However carefully the questions were worded, and some instructors spent a large amount of time preparing their questions, it was sometimes difficult for the instructor to judge in some cases whether a question was right or wrong. Sometimes the questions were half right. It was decided to allow the instructors to mark the answers in the way they felt best, and then ask them to record the final total correct out of four (the total number of questions). For example, one question might have four parts to it. If the parent got two parts right, it was given a 1/2 point, if the parent only got one part right it was given a 1/4 point. However with the final total for each questionnaire, the instructor was asked to give a total score rounded off to a 1/2. This meant that the instructor was making some judgement calls, but it was assumed that the instructor knew what information she had given and was the best judge of how well the parent was answering the questions on that parent education topic. It was also assumed that the instructor would be grading each of the three questionnaires in the same way, so that consistency would be maintained.

Originally the follow up test was to be given to the parents four weeks after the topic was presented in the parent education classroom. However, due to school holidays and some cancelled and then rescheduled parent education meetings, some of the follow up tests were given to parents five or six weeks after the topic was presented. It was felt that it was impossible to have all sixteen classes do the follow up test at exactly four weeks, so four to six weeks was considered an acceptable time lapse between the posttest and follow up test.

There was a drop off in the number of parents filling out questionnaires from the pretest to the posttest and to the follow up test (from pretest to posttest a loss of 18 parents, and from posttest to follow up test a loss of 17 parents). Some reasons for this have already been given: parents leaving meetings before the end; parents who were disinterested in answering identical questionnaires; parents feeling annoyed that they were involved in a project that they were given little information about. Also some parents were absent at the meeting when the follow up test was given. The drop in the number of parents filling out questionnaires from the pretest to the posttest and the posttest to the follow up test was in both cases less than 10%. Therefore this decrease in number of parents surveyed was not felt to affect the results of this outcome assessment project.

The main difficulty with this project was the lack of time during the parent education class to include presenting and filling out the Classroom Assessment Technique by the parents. Some parents obviously felt pressured for time and did not answer the

questionnaires completely (see the number of questions not answered in Tables 2 and 3). Other parents were outspoken to their instructor about the invasion of the Classroom Assessment Technique into their parent education time. Apart from the time factor, no other major roadblocks or difficulties occurred during the time frame of the project.

In comparison with the Minnesota Early Childhood Family Education Parent Outcome Interview Study (1992), this project surveyed a large number of parents in a short length of time with minimal personnel. The Minnesota Project surveyed a total of 183 parents across the state in two, 20 to 30 minute open-ended interviews. Some of these were done face to face and some by telephone and some by a mixture of these two methods. The study took two years to complete and involved professional evaluators and full time staff. Thirty six staff members worked on collecting the data and spent two full days analyzing it.

The Minnesota study provided more detailed outcome information than the one presented in this project. However, the outcome project presented here was virtually cost free. Sixteen parent education instructors volunteered their time over a period of three months. The time involved for those participating in the outcome assessment project was about six hours maximum. The assessment technique was developed and implemented and analyzed by one person working a few hours a week on the project for six months.

The information gathered from this outcome assessment project was shared with all parent education instructors at their bi-weekly staff inservice meeting in late May, 1994. A discussion followed on

the implication of the results and plans for the future of outcome assessment in the parent education program at the community college.

A report on the parent education outcome assessment was written and given to the Community College Educational Division Chairperson and the Parent Education Program Director. A more detailed report was written for the Community College Assessment Yearbook, 1994.

The outcome assessment project was completed within the planned time frame. No instructor dropped out of the project, and everyone handed in their questionnaires on time. Analysis of the data was straightforward and presented no specific problems. Planned reports were written and handed in to the appropriate personnel at the community college.

Results

Development of the instrument

The instrument that was developed consisted of a Classroom Assessment Technique that could be used by the parent education instructor to measure the amount learned, retained and implemented from the parent education lecture/discussion taught by the parent education instructor in the classroom.

The parents were asked on each questionnaire whether the answers they gave accurately reflected their knowledge of the topic. Out of 615 questionnaires completed only four parents checked "Do not agree" to this question. Therefore, as 99.35% of the parents scored themselves as agreeing that the questions they

were asked reflected with reasonable accuracy or better their knowledge of the parent education topic, the answers to the questions given by the parents in this instrument were assumed to be an accurate assessment of their knowledge of the topic as presented in the parent education classes.

The instrument was developed and used successfully in the parent education classrooms and by the parent education instructors. The assessment tool provided the information needed in the time framework allotted. The answers to the questions that were asked of the parents in the assessment tool were an accurate reflection of the parents' knowledge. Therefore this objective was met.

Rating of the instrument by instructors

One of the objectives of this project was to provide a Classroom Assessment Technique that 75% of the parent education instructors would rate as useful or better on a rating scale (see Appendix D).

Of the sixteen instructors who participated in the project and filled out the survey, 75% found the Classroom Assessment Technique very easy or easy to use, and 25% found it difficult to use (Table 5.1). The instructors who had classes with parents with younger children (under three years of age) present during the time the questionnaires were being filled out by the parents were the ones who reported some difficulties. Forty three percent of these instructors surveyed rated the instrument as difficult to use. Generally the instructors who had their parent education classes

in the evening without the children present (parents of children ages three, four and five), found the Classroom Assessment Technique easier to use with only 11% rating the instrument as difficult to use (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: Feedback from Instructors on Usefulness of the Classroom Assessment Technique

Question	Rating	No. of responses	Percentage
How easy to use	Very easy	6	37.5
	Easy	6	37.5
	Difficult	4	25
	Very difficult	0	0
How much feedback	A large amount	0	0
	Some feedback	11	69
	A little	5	31
	None	0	0
Make changes	Many changes	0	0
	Several changes	4	25
	A few	11	69
	No changes	1	6
Overall usefulness	Very useful	0	0
	Useful	5	31
	Somewhat useful	10	63
	Useless	1	6

N = 16

The instructors were asked if the Classroom Assessment Technique gave them any feedback on their teaching methods and on how much the parents were learning from the class. None of the instructors reported a large amount of feedback, but two thirds of them reported getting some feedback, and one third said they had a little feedback (Table 5.1).

In the classes with parents who had children under three, the instructors reported that they received much more feedback from using the instrument than in the instructors from the classes where the parents had children ages three to five years of age.

The parent education instructors were also asked whether they would make any changes in the future as to to how they might teach the parent education topic again. Most of the instructors stated they would make a few changes, and a quarter of them said they would make several changes. More of the instructors in the classes with the parents with very young children said they would make changes. These were the instructors who said they received more feedback, therefore they were more likely to state that they would make some changes in the future.

The overall usefulness of the classroom technique was rated by the instructors. The object stated at the beginning of this project was that 75% of the instructors would find it useful or better. This objective was not reached as 31% of the instructors stated they found the classroom technique useful or better. However nearly two thirds of the instructors found the instrument somewhat useful. See Table 5.1.

The Classroom Assessment Technique was discussed at the final parent education instructors' staff meeting. The comments made by the instructors at that time were of interest. Instructors found parts of the technique useful in different ways. In the future, some plan to devise and use informally just the pretest component to check the level of knowledge on a specific parent education topic of parents in their class. Other instructors were interested

in finding out more about how and where the parents used the information from the parent education talks. They will use the format of the follow up test with more emphasis on the parents' use of the information. Several instructors found the planning part of the assessment technique helpful. They felt that reducing the goals to two for their parent education talk and the objectives to four, was helpful to them in providing a focus and framework for their lecture/discussion.

The instructors reported verbally at the meeting after the completion of the outcome assessment project that they felt reinforced in what they are trying to achieve with parents by the result that showed 90% of the parents surveyed used the information from the parent education talk in the period four to six weeks immediately after the talk. Some instructors stated that they would not want to be doing this assessment technique for every class they taught as it took some work and quite a bit of their time. However they felt that it was a useful tool that they could put to use if necessary to give them feedback from a particular group of parents, and about a specific parent education topic. The parent education instructors felt validated professionally for attempting to implement a parent education outcome assessment on a small scale with no external assistance.

In summary, the parent education instructors found the instrument easy to use, somewhat useful, providing them with some feedback which they planned to use to make a few changes in teaching their parent education topic in the future. Some

instructors will modify and use the instrument in various ways in the future to help them enhance their teaching skills.

Measurement of the parent's learning, retention and implementation of the parent education topic

A total of 2,460 questions were answered by parents during the outcome assessment survey. The number of parents answering questions in the pretest was 228; 202 parents answered questions in the posttest; and 185 parents participated in the follow up test.

The Classroom Assessment Technique that was developed did measure the amount the parents learned, retained and implemented from the parent education lecture/discussion taught by the parent education instructor in the classroom.

The Classroom Assessment Technique showed that approximately half the questions were answered correctly by the parents on the first questionnaire. There was a gain in the number of questions answered correctly on the post test and this gain was almost completely maintained in the follow up test. The parents retained 95% of the material taught in the class up to 4 to 6 weeks later (see Tables 5.2 and 5.3).

When the results of the three questionnaires were broken down by the different age groups of the classes, there were no large differences in the results (see Tables 5.2 and 5.3). The parents with children over three years of age answered, on average, more questions correctly on the pretest than those parents with children under three years of age.

Table 5.2: Results of the Classroom Assessment Technique Used with Parents of Children Ages 3, 4 and 5 Years Old

	Percentage of questions answered correctly		
	Pretest	Posttest	Follow up test
	53	83	61
	37	72	72
	38	38	77
	56	88	88
	53	81	80
	48	79	56
	100	87	82
	87	87	84
	56	67	71
Average	59	76	75

Three instructors who participated in the survey presented questionnaires to two classes. Two of these instructors taught the same topic to two different classes. The number of the questions answered correctly were similar in both cases. For one instructor's two classes, the percentage improvement in questions answered correctly in the follow up test from the pretest was identical.

In two situations the same parent education topic was given to two different classes by two different instructors. The instructors used different questions to reflect their objectives. The final results were very similar to each other in the increase in questions answered correctly, both in the posttest and the follow up test.

Table 5.3: Results of the Classroom Assessment Technique Used with Parents of Children Under Three Years Old

	Percentage of questions answered correctly		
	Pretest	Posttest	Follow up test
	28	60	80
	88	95	92
	13	69	55
	28	82	67
	62	64	67
	50	70	67
	93	73	75
Average	52	73	72

One instructor forgot to give the posttest after her parent education lecture. She sent the questionnaire home to each parent who attended the meeting with a note requesting a prompt return. The response was extremely small (4 out of a possible 20 questionnaires were returned). The total number of questions answered correctly on the posttest in this case does not fit the general pattern of results for the rest of the classes surveyed.

Four instructors produced questionnaires which resulted in an extremely high number of correct answers on the pretest. That is, the parents scored above 85%. This may have been because the questions were too easy, or it may have been that the parents were already fairly knowledgeable about the parent education topic that was to be taught. Obviously, when the parents score that well on the pretest the percentage increase (or decrease) in the correct number of questions answered on the posttest and follow up test was significantly affected.

Out of the 185 parents who completed the follow up questionnaire, a total of 90% of these parents surveyed stated that they used the information from the parent education lecture and discussion in some way to enhance their parenting and/or personal skills in the period of four to six weeks after the class was given. (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4: Parents Reported Use of the Information Taught in the Parent Education Classes

	Percentage
Used the information very much	13
Used the information a lot	33
Used the information a little	44
Used the information not at all	4
Did not answer the question	6
Total	100

N = 185

The above results show that the objective of finding out how much parents are learning, retaining and implementing information from the parent education lecture/discussion in the classroom was met.

CHAPTER VI

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This project showed that parents improved their knowledge of the topics taught in the parent education classes, and that they retained that knowledge almost completely over a period of four to six weeks after the class was taken. In addition 90 per cent of the parents surveyed reported using the information to enhance or improve their personal and/or parenting skills during that four to six week period. Parent education instructors, while not overwhelmingly rating the instrument useful, nearly two thirds of them rated it somewhat useful.

The first outcome of this project was that an instrument was developed to measure the amount the parents learned, retained and implemented from the parent education lecture/discussion taught by parent education instructors in the classroom. The instrument was administered to parents and scored by the instructors. Parents perceived that the instrument reflected with reasonable accuracy or better their knowledge of the parent education topic.

The instrument reached these objectives in a relatively short time frame by using a simple classroom technique that did not take very much time for the parent education instructors to develop, administer and score. The number of questions asked the parents (four) were developed by the parent education instructor for her own topic. She knew her topic and the level of parent's knowledge well. The questions were appropriate and specifically reflected the goals and objectives of the parent education lecture. Therefore the

parents felt confident in rating the accuracy of their knowledge of the parent education topic on the questionnaires.

The second outcome was not not reached. Less than 75% of the parent education instructors using the Classroom Assessment Technique rated it useful or better.

The reasons for the instructors not finding the technique more useful could be partially explained the amount of time it took to do the whole technique from working on goals and objectives for their parent education topic, to developing appropriate, pertinent questions, to presenting the three sets of questionnaires and collecting them from parents, to scoring the answers on the questionnaires. All this was obviously was an added burden on to the instructors' already busy lives.

Instructors were very helpful with their comments on the drawbacks of the Classroom Assessment Technique. Some instructors felt that it took too much time away from the classroom lecture and discussion and that the gain from the feedback from the instrument did not outweigh the loss of teaching time with the parents.

Instructors felt that they did not always get a response from the whole class and therefore the results may not have been fully representative. The fact that some parents were annoyed at being given three identical questionnaires to fill out without much explanation was commented on by several instructors. The instructors felt that they may have lost some ground with a few parents by using this type of assessment technique. Some instructors felt the assessment technique was too much like a test.

These instructors felt that this was not appropriate in a parent education classroom.

Instructors with classes for parents of children under three years of age who gave their parent education topics in the classroom with the children found the pencil and paper aspect of the instrument a hindrance.

Finally, some instructors felt that having written down the goals and objectives for their parent education topic and devised the questions for the parents to answer to fit these, the then felt that they could not take time to move away from their objectives during the class discussion. The instructors felt that the assessment technique was too limiting in this respect.

The third outcome was met in that the instrument was able to measure by use of the Classroom Assessment Technique how much the parents learned from the parent education topic taught in the classroom and how much the parents used the information presented.

The number of parents who used, or did not use, the material taught in the parent education class varied depending on the topic taught in the class (see Appendix G), and varied from class to class. Parents of children two years of age and under generally reported less use of the material taught in the class. The reason for this might be that some of the topics taught in the parent education classes for parents of children under two years are often on subjects that may be of use to parents in the future. The parent education instructor is trying to encourage parents to think ahead and plan parenting behavior for the future developmental stages that their children will go through. Examples of this were in

topics such as *Rules and Limits* for parents of infants, *Toilet Training* for parents of one year olds and *Dealing with Anger* for parents of two year olds. These parents may not have needed to use the information from the class during the four to six weeks between the posttest and follow up test, although it could be that they would use the information at a later date.

Some topics rated high in the number of parents reporting use of the information and also low. This can be explained (for example with the topic *Coping with Loss*) by the fact that the topic was pertinent and useful for some parents immediately, so they used the material. For others in the class the topic did not apply to their life at this time, although the material may well be helpful in the future, so these parents did not use the material during the four to six weeks after the topic was presented to them.

In some cases the topic was presented to late in the child's development to be of current use to the parents. For example the topic *Sleep Problems* for parents of children turning three years of age was given too late in the year to be of much use to the parents, according to the instructor's comments. She felt she had already answered many individual questions on this topic earlier when problems arose, and that, in future, she would offer the topic much earlier in the year.

The fact that the follow up test showed that there was generally very little drop off (1%) in retention of information, as measured by the questions answered, over a four to six week period was interesting. However, one of the maxims of education is that if students use the information learned in some way they are

less likely to forget it. The parents in this survey reported a high amount of use of the information, and therefore they remembered the information well. This could be one reason. Another could be that the class material was simply and clearly presented, and was practical and useable for the parents. Therefore the information had meaning for the parents, and they remembered the information and then used it. The implication for parent education outcome is that parents learn best if the information taught can be applied and used in their everyday life with their families.

The rather high level of the scores on the pretest (57% and 52% correct answers) is possibly due to two factors. Firstly, some of the instructors had not spent enough time making sure that they questions they asked their parents were not too easy. As stated previously, in a few classes the pretest scores were 85% or above. Secondly, many of the parents who have had several children in the parent education program have been taking parent education classes for several years. Many parents have heard the basic parent education topics many times. Therefore these parents could possibly score fairly high on the pretest.

The classes with parents of infants did not perform as well as the classes with parents of three, four and five year olds. The reasons for these classes not doing as well on this Classroom Assessment Technique are as follows. The classroom set up was not conducive to doing a pencil and paper test. The parents have their babies on their lap, in a Snuggli carrier, or playing nearby. The parents were sitting on mats on the floor, and it was hard to find something to rest the questionnaire upon to be able to write. Often

the babies wanted to play with the pencil and paper. The pencils were sharp and were a possible danger to the infants. Therefore some of the parents stopped filling out the questionnaire. Often the parents would get up and leave the discussion circle to change or feed the baby: constant attendance within the group was a problem. This was a problem to a slightly lesser extent in the classes where parent had one and two year olds in the parent education class with them.

The lecture/discussion format for the infant classes relied rather more on questions and input from parents than the other classes. Therefore some of the objectives for the classroom parent education topic were not always met because the instructor ran out of time when the classroom discussion veered off the chosen topic.

Recommendations

One of the recommendations for doing a project similar to this in the future, would be to allow plenty of time before the implementation of the Classroom Assessment Technique for the instructors to write, not only their goals and objectives for their class, but especially to allow time for them to formulate their questions. Writing good, applicable, appropriate questions is time consuming and this part of the project needs monitoring and checking before the questionnaires are developed for the parents to fill out.

Many of the instructors did seek assistance in writing their questions, and some sets of questions went through several drafts before reaching the final stage. However, some instructors were

extremely busy in their work at the time of the project, and submitted their questions to be typed and prepared in questionnaire form just the day before the pretest was to be given. Consequently there was no time for adjusting the questions asked on a few questionnaires to provide a more in depth answers. More time at the beginning of the project would have allowed the instructors to produce questions that they felt happier with as an end result.

It would be advisable to check the questions very carefully before presenting them to the parents in the questionnaire form. The questions should be of a reasonably challenging level so that the parents cannot answer them too easily. Also the questions should not be phrased to that they can be answered with just a "yes" or "no".

A recommendation could be made for parents to answer a question on the pretest questionnaire on how many years they have been enrolled in parent education classes. In addition, a question on whether they have heard a parent education talk on the current topic before. This would give helpful information to the instructor on whether some parents in the class might already know quite a lot about the parent education topic already.

In the future, if this Classroom Assessment Technique were repeated, it would be advantageous to spend some effort in planning how to give parents as much information as possible about the project without jeopardizing the results. Parents need to feel included and connected in some way to the research project if their full cooperation is needed.

One of the strongest concerns that was made by the instructors about the Classroom Assessment Technique was that the parents felt left out and were given too little explanation of the Classroom Assessment Technique. This is a delicate situation. If the parents are told too much it could interfere with the results of the assessment technique. It is suggested that one way that might have proven effective would have been to send a letter (or give the letter out in class) to each parent taking part in the outcome assessment project informing them that they would be participating in a research project and asking them to follow the instructors directions for a few weeks without asking too many questions. The parents could be told that, on the completion of the project, they would be given a second informational letter telling them all the detail of the project and the results. By giving the parents the information this way, it would save time for the instructor giving time consuming explanations in the class. It would also treat the parents in a professional way as taking part in an experiment, and hopefully would make them feel more included. The parents possibly would do a better job of filling out the questionnaires if they understand more what is going on and feel included and consulted.

One of the main criticisms of the classroom technique was the amount of time it took from the parent education talk. In planning to use the Classroom Assessment Technique it is advisable to either schedule extra time to allow for giving the pretest and the posttest at the same classroom session as the lecture/discussion. Or to plan to give the pretest ahead of time in the classroom as

long as the parents are not exposed to the information due to be given at the parent education talk ahead of time.

However, it is not advisable to send any of the questionnaires home with parents to complete. Apart from the possibility that parents may use notes, handouts or parenting books to look up the answers, the return rate of the questionnaires could be very low, as demonstrated by one example in this project.

By chance in this project, some of the topics were taught twice to different groups of parents, either by the same instructor or by different instructors. This provided interesting comparisons of data collected by the assessment technique. In future outcome assessment projects using the Classroom Assessment Technique, this duplication factor should be built in to the implementation.

In the parent education classroom where children were present while the parents participated in the lecture/discussion, there was a real problem handling the pencil and paper aspect of doing the questionnaires. This Classroom Assessment Technique may not be the most appropriate method to use in such classes.

Alternatives to that could be used would be to telephone the parents and ask the questions over the telephone. However, by doing this the anonymity of the parents is removed. The parents may also feel more threatened by the "test" aspect of answering questions directly to the instructor. This method, too, is much more time consuming for the instructor to carry out as compared with the paper and pencil, in-class questionnaire method. One of the goals for this Classroom Assessment Technique was to make the whole process to be as little time consuming as possible. It may be

difficult to telephone or reach all twenty or more parents from the class immediately for the posttest, thereby making it more like a follow up test if too much time had elapsed.

The question in the Classroom Assessment Technique question on how much the parents had used the information would have provided more interesting data if the next question had asked how the information was used. This would have provided more feedback for the parent education instructors which could have been incorporated into future parent education topics taught by them.

Currently there are no plans for this strategy to be used on an ongoing basis in the work setting or elsewhere at the community college. More discussion on outcome assessment in other areas of the parent education program will continue next fall, but plans for the next stage of assessment are uncertain at this time.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Evaluation Currently in Use at the Community College

Not observed
Unsatisfactory
Needs to Improve
Satisfactory
Definite Strength

PARENT EDUCATION INSTRUCTOR EVALUATION FORM

Instructor's Name _____ Group _____

How long as your instructor? Year(s) _____ Months _____

1. Provides information about normal childhood growth and behavior.
2. Is a positive role model with the children.
3. Works cooperatively with the children's teacher.
4. Establishes a mutually respectful relationship with the parent group.
5. Facilitates an effective group discussion.
6. Adapts discussion topics and methods to the needs of the group.
7. Provides information and raises issues about parenting and family life to stimulate and extend interest.
8. Speaks clearly and effectively.
9. Presents information in an interesting and concise manner. (Does not ramble.)
10. Listens effectively to individuals and group discussion.
11. Presents accurate information and identifies sources of information.
12. Teaches guidance and discipline techniques for handling typical behavior of young children.
13. Serves as an objective resource during group business.
14. Encourages parents to use each other as resources.
15. Allows parents to express ideas that may differ from the instructor's views.
16. Accepts and supports individual differences/values.
17. Demonstrates an ability to be flexible and adaptable.
18. Projects enthusiasm for the program and the parent education instructor role.
19. Is responsible and dependable.
20. Is knowledgeable and skilled as a family life instructor.

Please comment on qualities, skills, and/or knowledge that either contribute to this instructor's effectiveness or need to be improved/developed or cause difficulties.

_____

_____

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Appendix B

Instructions to Parent Education Instructors on How to Use the Classroom Assessment Technique 1 (CAT 1)

1. Choose the parent education class in which to carry out CAT 1.
2. Choose the parent education topic that you will teach that class.
3. Write down two learning goals for that parent education topic.
4. Write down two objectives for each goal (four objectives total).
5. Formulate these objectives into four answerable questions for the parents in your class.
6. Fill out the information sheet (Outcome Assessment Project) - attached - and return it to me
7. Your questions will be returned to you typed on three different colored sheets, labeled OA 1, OA 2, and OA 3.
8. **Before** you teach the parent education topic give the parents a short explanation about what they are being asked to do, and then give out the first set of questions (OA 1) to the parents to fill out anonymously. Collect these **before** you teaching the topic.
9. **At the end** of teaching the topic give out the second set of questions (OA 2) and ask the parents to answer the questions anonymously. Collect these from the parents.
10. **One month later** give the third set of questions (OA 3) to the parents to answer. Collect these from the parents.
11. When you have looked at all of the results, please fill out the survey of the CAT 1 (you will receive this later).
12. Put all the answered questions and the survey sheet in the envelope provided and return it to me.

Appendix C

Outcome Assessment Project

Instructor's Name.....Tel. No.....

Name of class.....Number of parents in class.....

Date(s) of the class.....

Parent Education topic.....

Two goals for the topic 1).....

.....

2).....

.....

Four objectives for the goals above (two for each goal)

1).....

2).....

3).....

4).....

Four questions to ask parents that reflect your objectives

1).....

.....

2).....

.....

3).....

.....

4).....

.....

Use the other side if necessary.

Appendix D

Survey of Parent Education Instructors on Classroom Assessment Technique 1 (CAT 1)

Instructor's Name.....Date.....

Name of the Class.....

Title of the parent education topic taught.....

.....

Total number of parents who attended the class.....

Date(s) the topic was taught.....

1) How easy did you feel the CAT 1 was to use? (Check one)

Very easy *Easy* *Difficult* *Very difficult*

2) How much feedback did the CAT 1 give you on whether you were reaching your learning goals and objectives for the topic you taught? (Check one)

A large amount *Some feedback* *A little* *None*

3) Will you make any changes in how you teach this topic next time, based on the results of giving CAT 1 to your class? (Check one)

Many changes *Several changes* *Few changes* *No changes*

4) If you do plan on making changes, what changes would you make?.....

.....

.....

5) Rate the appropriate overall usefulness of CAT 1 (check one)

Very useful *Useful* *Somewhat useful* *Useless*

Appendix E

Example of Follow Up Questionnaire (OA 3)

GF/t (code for instructor and class)
Date.....

MANAGING ANGER CONSTRUCTIVELY

Please answer the following questions

1. Anger is the expression of a lot of different negative emotions. Name any three emotions expressed as anger.

2. Give two examples of ways you could help yourself defuse your anger.

3. Give an example of a constructive anger statement.

4. Give two examples of ways you could help your child express anger constructively.

The answers I have given to the questions listed above accurately reflects my knowledge of the above topic (circle one):

Agree *Somewhat agree* *Somewhat disagree* *Disagree*

How much have you used the information from the parent education talk "*Managing Anger Constructively*" at home during the past month to improve your parenting and/or personal skills (circle one):

Very much *A lot* *A little* *Not at all*

TC.(Total Answers Correct).....

Appendix F

Ten week Calendar Plan

Week 1

At the bi-weekly parent education instructors' staff meeting, an introductory talk was given to the twenty eight parent education instructors at the community college about outcome assessment in parent education. The goals, objectives and time line of the planned outcome assessment project, using the Classroom Assessment Technique, was also given to the instructors.

The instructors were also given an informational talk on the rationale for the outcome assessment tool (Classroom Assessment Technique 1 - CAT 1) which will enable them to get feedback from their parent education classes in four areas. First, to find out the level of the parents' knowledge about the proposed parent education topic. Second, to find out the amount of material retained from the parent education talk by the parents directly after the topic is given. Third, to check the amount of material from the class remembered by the parents one month after the topic was presented. Fourth, to check, one month later, if the parents had used the material taught in the class to enhance their parenting skills with their families.

An explanation of how to use the CAT 1 in their parent education class was given. Each instructor received a copy of the handout "Instructions to Parent Education Instructors on How to Use the Classroom Assessment Technique 1 (CAT 1) (Appendix B).

At the same staff meeting the parent education instructors met in small groups, divided according to the age of the children in

their preschools, to brainstorm suggestions for their teaching goals and objectives for the parent education classes they plan to teach during the next month. The small groups also discussed how to turn the objectives for their parent education lectures into questions to ask the parents in their class for the Classroom Assessment Technique.

At this meeting the parent education instructors chose whether they wanted to participate in using the Classroom Assessment Technique with the parents in their parent education classes, and to provide feedback as to whether they found the CAT 1 useful to them by filling out a survey form at the end of the project. If the parent education instructor signed up to participate they were given a copy of the Outcome Assessment Project Form (Appendix C) and asked to return it in two weeks time at the next instructors' staff meeting.

Week 2

The parent education instructors who chose to participate in the outcome assessment project worked on their own to write the final two goals and two objectives for each goal for the parent education lecture they plan to give. They also formulated the four questions from the objectives to ask the parents in the class on the questionnaires. Every instructor was asked to provide the same number of questions (four), although each topic taught was different. Assistance was available by telephone, or in person if necessary, to help instructors to clarify their teaching goals and formulate their questions.

Week 3

At the parent education instructors' staff meeting all the completed forms were collected from the instructors who have chosen to participate in the CAT 1 Project. Time was taken at this meeting to check that each instructor understood the procedure for using the Classroom Assessment Technique. The survey form entitled "Survey of Parent Education Instructors on the Classroom Assessment Technique 1 (CAT 1)" (Appendix D) was explained to the instructors who chose to participate in the project.

The questions for each class were typed for each instructor to use in their class (see Appendix E for a sample questionnaire). There were three sets of questions for each class: one for the pretest, one for the posttest to be used directly after the class, and one set of questions to be given the parents one month after the class. These were printed on three different paper colors and labelled OA 1, OA 2 and OA 3. Each of the question sheets had a fifth question added at the end: "The above answers I gave to the questions adequately represents my knowledge of the subject matter?". This had a four part scale for a response: agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, and disagree. The third questionnaire also had an extra question (Question # 6): "I have used the information taught in the class to enhance my parenting skills and to enhance my family strengths". This also had a four part rating scale: very much, a lot, a little, not at all. The relevant sets of questionnaires were given back to each instructor, together with the survey form for the instructors to fill out at the end of the outcome assessment project. The instructors already had a copy of

instruction on how to use the Classroom Assessment Technique (Appendix B).

Week 4 - Week 10

The parent education instructors at the community college used the Classroom Assessment Technique with their chosen parent education class. Assistance was available to assist them if needed. Any mid-course corrections needed to be made were done at this point. The instructors collected the completed questionnaires and marked whether the questions were answered correctly on each questionnaire. They filled out the survey form (Appendix D) and handed in this together with the questionnaires.

Week 11

All the information from the parent education instructors was collected and analyzed. The information was collated and looked at from the point of view of each objective for the outcome assessment project.

Week 12

The results of the outcome assessment project were written up in report form. A copy was given to the Director of the Parent Education Program, and the Chairperson of the Educational Division of the community college, for their future use. A summary of all the information collected during this project was given to all the parent education instructors at the community college, both in writing and in a short talk at the instructors' staff meeting in

May, 1994. Verbal comments from the participating parent education instructors on the Classroom Assessment Technique were noted.

The future plans for parent education outcome assessment at the community college were discussed at the instructor's staff meeting.

Appendix G

Parents Reported Use of the Parent Education Information by Parent Education Topic and by the Ages of the Children of the Parents in the Class

PARENTS OF FOUR AND FIVE YEAR OLDS

Topic: Self Esteem
Number of responses 11

Use of information taught		
	Very much	0%
	A lot	27%
	A little	64%
	Not at all	0%
	No answer	9%

Topic: Beginnings and Endings: Coping with Loss
Number of responses 11

Use of information taught		
	Very much	27%
	A lot	27%
	A little	36%
	Not at all	9%
	No answer	0%

Topic: Beginnings and Endings: Coping with Loss
Number of responses 15

Use of information taught		
	Very much	7%
	A lot	27%
	A little	53%
	Not at all	13%
	No answer	0%

Topic: Coping with Loss
Number of responses 11

Use of information taught		
	Very much	0%
	A lot	36%
	A little	64%
	Not at all	0%
	No answer	0%

Topic: Traits of a Healthy Family
Number of responses 9

Use of information taught		
	Very much	22%
	A lot	33%
	A little	45%
	Not at all	0%
	No answer	0%

PARENTS OF THREE YEAR OLDS

Topic: How to Communicate
Number of Responses 13

Use of information taught		
	Very much	31%
	A lot	31%
	A little	31%
	Not at all	7%
	No answer	0%

Topic: How to Communicate
Number of Responses 18

Use of information taught		
	Very much	6%
	A lot	72%
	A little	22%
	Not at all	0%
	No answer	0%

Topic: Getting Along with Others - Developing Problem Solving Skills
Number of Responses 4

Use of information taught		
	Very much	22%
	A lot	33%
	A little	45%
	Not at all	0%
	No answer	0%

Topic: Chores for Children
Number of responses 14

Use of information taught		
	Very much	14%
	A lot	29%
	A little	50%
	Not at all	0%
	No answer	7%

PARENTS OF TWO YEAR OLDS

Topic: Managing Anger Constructively
Number of responses 12

Use of information taught:		
	Very much	30%
	A lot	37%
	A little	33%
	Not at all	0%
	No answer	0%

Topic: Sleep Problems
Number of responses 15

Use of information taught:		
	Very much	0%
	A lot	27%
	A little	27%
	Not at all	13%
	No answer	33%

PARENTS OF ONE YEAR OLDS

Topic: Temperament and Individual Differences
Number of responses 14

Use of information taught:	
Very much	7%
A lot	29%
A little	50%
Not at all	0%
No answer	14%

Topic: Temperament
Number of responses 20

Use of information taught:	
Very much	0%
A lot	35%
A little	50%
Not at all	5%
No answer	10%

Topic: Toilet Training
Number of responses 9

Use of information taught:	
Very much	11%
A lot	33%
A little	45%
Not at all	0%
No answer	11%

PARENTS OF INFANTS

Topic: Social/Emotional Development
Number of responses 3

Use of information taught:	
Very much	33%
A lot	0%
A little	66%
Not at all	0%
No answer	0%

Topic: Discipline/Limit Setting
Number of responses 6

Use of information taught:	
Very much	0%
A lot	50%
A little	17%
Not at all	17%
No answer	16%

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